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St. Barnabas starts 'Cognitive Brain Health Program'

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GIBSONIA — The St. Barnabas Health System has partnered with a neurosurgeon and brain health expert to start the initiative "Cognitive Brain Health Program."

It is designed to help preserve brain health as people age. The system on Jan. 1 partnered with Dr. Joseph Maroon, the team neurosurgeon for the Pittsburgh Steelers who co-developed the "Immediate Post-Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing" used by most professional sports teams.

"This is a program of empowerment. We don't have to accept that conditions like adult-onset diabetes, dementia and Alzheimer's disease always comes with aging," said Maroon in a statement.

Robin Taylor, a spokesman for the system, said the program is based in four areas: diet, exercise, stress relief and environment.

"It's an overall picture of what you can do to improve your life," Taylor said.

The program will start in February with education on these subjects and will be followed with cognitive testing, having supplements made available and consultation on an individual basis.

She said the program will start with St. Barnabas residents. Once it is established, she said the system hopes to take it out to the community.

Diet includes actions such as eating healthy foods, making sure to get all of the necessary nutrients, avoiding high fat foods and using supplements properly.

Exercise includes getting enough physical activity so the brain is getting the proper amount of oxygen it needs.

Taylor said stress relief could include a number of activities, such as socializing, playing games, praying or meditating. Environment focuses on not smoking and avoiding pollutants.

She said that use of these tactics can help reduce the odds of people developing dementia or Alzheimer's as they age. Although there can be a hereditary component to these problems, she said that occurs only in about 20 percent of cases.

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